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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2214
INFO RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI 1584
RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 2388

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000232

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PREF](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: AUTHORITIES DENY ACCESS TO ACTIVIST BUI KIM THANH

REF: A. HCMC 221; B) HCMC 103; B) 06 HCMC 1483; C) 06 HCMC

[1](#)B. 1361 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)1. (SBU) On March 14, the HCMC External Relations Office (ERO) responded in the negative to a ConGen diplomatic note informing the GVN of our plan to visit Bui Kim Thanh, the HCMC land rights activist who was involuntarily committed to a mental institution in November 2006. In our dipnote to the ERO on March 12, we also had sought a meeting with relevant hospital staff to discuss the case. The ERO noted that it "cannot arrange the meeting as it (the Thanh case) is an internal affair of Vietnamese functional authorities."

[1](#)2. (SBU) Nonetheless, Poloff traveled to Dong Nai Province on March 15 to attempt to visit Thanh. Prior to setting out, we informed the HCMC ERO, noting that, while we regretted not being able to meet with hospital officials, we still would seek to meet with Thanh. En route, we contacted Hospital Director Nguyen Van Tho to inform him of our visit. The Director did not object to the visit and noted that we could meet with hospital staff involved in the case. Ten minutes later, however, the Director called back after consulting with "the authorities" to say that "foreigners" could not be allowed access to the hospital without prior permission. The guards would not allow us in, he told us. And so it was, upon our arrival at the facility. PolOff handed the guards a letter to the Director outlining our disappointment at not being able to review the case with him or his staff or to visit Thanh, and noting increasing international interest in Thanh.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment: The initial willingness of the hospital director to facilitate our visit indicates that the decision to deny us access was made at the political level and that there was no practical reason from his perspective as to why we could not visit. While we were not successful in gaining access to Thanh this time, our visit was a clear signal that we take this case very seriously and will continue to pursue it. End Comment.

WINNICK